

## *Ten Questions to Ask a Conservator*

Locating a conservator is easy, thanks to the “Finding a Conservator” search engine on the American Institute for Conservation website ([www.conservation-us.org/findaconservator](http://www.conservation-us.org/findaconservator)). You can enter the material specialty (such as book and paper, paintings, objects), the type of service you need (treatment, display advice, storage, etc.), and a zip code or city to get a list of AIC Professional Associates and Fellows who have agreed to follow the AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice.

But how do you select from that list? How do you determine which conservator will offer the best care for your treasure?

Here are some questions you may consider asking:

**1. Where did you get your training?**

Conservators prepare themselves through graduate degree programs, apprentice training, or other studio training. Find out as much as you can about their training – who they studied with, for how long, and who they worked with. Have they kept up their skills through additional training or attendance at professional conferences?

**2. How many years of professional experience do you have?**

Conservators hone their professional practice over time, encountering new problems, devising new solutions, and sharpening their approach to particular treatments or processes.

**3. What other services do you offer? Is conservation your primary activity?**

Is conservation something they specialize in, or offer as a sideline?

**4. Do you have experience working with my type of object or situation?**

Conservators typically specialize in a particular range of materials, since the types of analysis, causes of deterioration, and treatment methods can vary greatly between, say, watercolor paintings and metal sculpture.

**5. Are you involved in conservation organizations?**

Membership in most conservation organizations, including AIC, is open to anyone. However, AIC Professional Associates and Fellows have agreed to follow the AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice (which are available on the AIC Website: [www.conservation-us.org/coredocs](http://www.conservation-us.org/coredocs)). Ask about involvement in leadership positions or committees of international, national, or regional conservation organizations.

**6. How soon would you be able to provide the services I need?**

As with any professional, conservators may have a backlog of work promised for other clients. Ask about expected starting and ending dates to avoid any misunderstandings.

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## 7. Can you provide references? Can I contact previous clients?

This is probably the most important step to take when hiring any professional. If possible, speak with clients who had work done similar to yours. Ask about their satisfaction with the work done, the time it took, costs, and how the conservator communicated with them. Remember that conservators typically can only publicize their work with the client's permission, so a complete client list is not a reasonable expectation.

## 8. What security will you provide for my object? Who is responsible for insurance?

Be clear who will provide insurance while your object is with the conservator. If a value is needed, who will provide that figure? The AIC Code of Ethics states that appraisal of value is a conflict of interest for conservators, so an independent appraisal may be required for valuable items.

## 9. What are the risks involved to the object from the recommended treatment?

Because materials vary from one object to another, and because coatings or other aspects of an object may have been added or altered over time, there may be risks involved with certain treatment options. Conservators do not always agree on the best course of action. Speak to a number of conservators if you are unable to make a comfortable decision. Be cautious if the conservator is reluctant to discuss in detail the materials and methods to be used, or will not permit you to see work in progress.

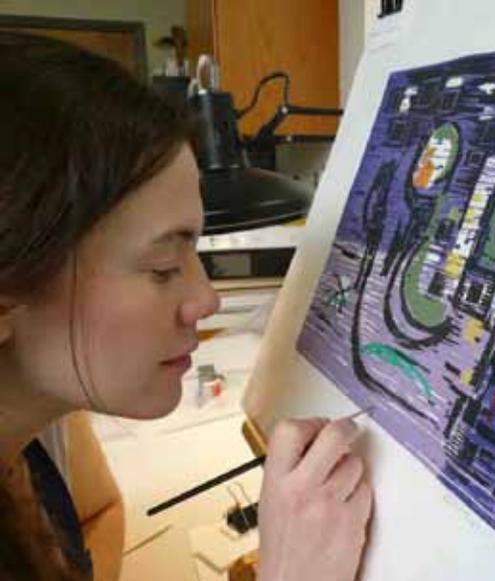
## 10. What will I be charged?

Costs for conservation services are based on the time and materials required to perform and document the treatment as well as levels of specialization and the particular expertise of individual conservators and, by and large, not on the value of the object being treated. Be wary of those who propose to perform a quick and inexpensive "restoration" job. Is there a separate charge for an estimate or preliminary examination? Will that amount be applied toward treatment if you agree to proceed? Are there separate charges for insurance or shipping? What are the terms for payment? Will you receive a report that includes a full description of what was done as well as documentation of conditions before and after treatment?

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

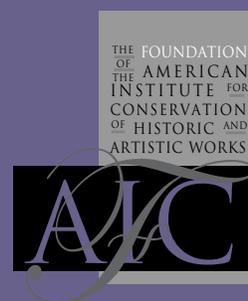
- AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice: [www.conservation-us.org/coredocs](http://www.conservation-us.org/coredocs)
- Find a Conservator: [www.conservation-us.org/findaconservator](http://www.conservation-us.org/findaconservator)
- About AIC: [www.conservation-us.org/aboutaic](http://www.conservation-us.org/aboutaic)
- Frequently Asked Questions about conservation and conservators: [www.conservation-us.org/faq](http://www.conservation-us.org/faq)

*These recommendations are intended as guidance only. AIC does not assume responsibility or liability from their use.*



## ABOUT AIC

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) is the only national membership organization supporting the professionals who preserve our cultural heritage. AIC plays a crucial role in establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, providing educational opportunities, and fostering the exchange of knowledge among conservators, allied professionals, and the public. Learn more about AIC at [www.conservation-us.org](http://www.conservation-us.org).



## ABOUT FAIC

FAIC, the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works, supports conservation education, research, and outreach activities that increase understanding of our global cultural heritage. Learn more about FAIC at [www.conservation-us.org/foundation](http://www.conservation-us.org/foundation).



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